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ABSTRACT

This report identifies the strategies that multiproblem urban school districts have used to make major improvements in recent years. A panel of experts familiar with urban school systems nominated over 30 candidate urban districts for study. The following districts were chosen for analysis: (1) Atlanta (Georgia); (2) Cincinnati (Ohio); (3) Memphis (Tennessee); (4) Miami (Florida); (5) Pittsburgh (Pennsylvania); and (6) San Diego (California). Data were drawn from intensive interviews conducted with local school and community leaders in the 1987-88 school year. The major findings include the need for a cooperative effort on the part of the school superintendent, the business community, the teachers' union, and the school board to perform the following tasks: (1) reach out and involve the larger community in educational issues; (2) make information about school needs, resources, and performance widely available; (3) forge communitywide agreement about improvement goals; and (4) subordinate the traditional roles of boards, administrators, and teachers to the larger imperative of systemwide improvement. The roles of the following participants in reform are discussed in detail: (1) school superintendent; (2) school board; (3) business and community leaders; (4) teachers and unions; (5) the media; (6) State and Federal governments; and (7) national foundations. A list of 18 references is appended. (FMW)

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# Educational Progress

## Cities Mobilize to Improve Their Schools

Paul T. Hill, Arthur E. Wise, Leslie Shapiro

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January 1989

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Center for the Study of
the Teaching Profession

# PREFACE

In September 1987, a grant from the James S. McDonnell Foundation of St. Louis enabled RAND to study big-city school districts that had reputedly made major improvements in recent years. McDonnell's interest was stimulated by a recent trickle of "good news" from a few urban school systems. Some claimed to have raised students' test scores above the national average for the first time in decades. Others had made concrete and promising improvements, including settling long-standing teacher labor disputes, stopping middle-class flight from the public schools, and raising school revenues for the first time in years.

Counterbalancing the good news was evidence that student achievement, attendance, and graduation rates remain low in most big-city school systems. It seemed premature to assume that any school system had solved all of its problems, but it was appropriate to ask how some systems had begun to improve. The basic goal of the study was therefore to understand the processes by which some cities started and sustained improvement.

Focusing on a small number of multiproblem urban school districts that were reported to have made significant improvements in recent years, RAND tried to identify the nature of changes made, the leadership needed to develop and implement improvement strategies, the coalitions and resources required to make the improvements lasting, and the challenges still remaining. The study did not look for a single "best" process for improvement. Rather, it sought to provide a set of ideas and examples that business and community leaders, superintendents, and school boards across the country could use in developing their own improvement strategies.

## SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

A panel of experts familiar with urban school systems nominated over 30 candidate urban districts. RAND selected six of these—Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Atlanta, Miami, Memphis, and San Diego—for intensive interviews with local school and community leaders in the 1987–1988 school year. The following key findings are based on these case studies:

- Despite the many and complex problems that beset big-city school systems, some have created processes that promise to marshal the necessary ideas, funds, and person-power necessary for educational improvement.
- A failing urban school system can be turned around only if the entire community unites on its behalf.
- "Choice" plans that encourage parents to seek alternatives to public schooling are not necessary for improvement of big-city schools.
- Communitywide educational improvement strategies have two strands: an outside strand that gathers broad community support and resources and an inside strand that changes the ways schools are run and instruction is delivered. In many cities, the outside strand is the more fully developed of the two. The prospects for real and sustained improvements in the schools are greatest where the inside and outside strands are both well developed and closely articulated.
- The public supports improvement because it understands that the failure of the education system could threaten the social and economic future of the community, not because it is offered a surefire curriculum or other educational panacea. Because public support is based on the importance of the problem, rather than on a promised easy solution, this support can be sustained through the inevitably long process of trial and error that big cities must undergo to improve schooling for the disadvantaged.
- No improvement effort can succeed without an active school superintendent, but the superintendent need not dominate the process. Coalitions of the business community, local political leaders, the teachers' union, and the superintendent support the most promising reform processes.
- The most effective superintendents create a public *mandate* for improvement, not unlike the electoral mandate that government officials seek. The superintendent's mandate is a clear statement

of educational priorities, based on broad public consultation. It can become the agenda for the improvement effort and a yardstick against which progress is measured.

- Involvement of powerful community actors reduces the status and independence of school administrators and the school board. The board plays a disciplined and limited role in the improvement process, including participating in the setting of priorities and evaluating the superintendent's actions in light of them.
- Business leadership can provide the broad strategic thinking that places educational problems in the context of other community social and economic events. Business leaders can provide funds to underwrite innovations, but often their greatest contribution lies in raising educational problems to the top of the local public agenda.
- In some cities, teachers' union leaders have helped create the broad improvement processes and have defined their members' interests in light of the need for improvement. Various local groups can make plans, but they cannot create classroom changes without the participation of a powerful, well-led teachers' union.
- Many big cities other than the six studied have the financial, intellectual, and leadership resources needed to build their own educational improvement strategies. To initiate an effort, the school superintendent, business community, teachers' union, and school board must unite to:
  - Reach out and involve the larger community in educational issues
  - Make information about school needs, resources, and performance widely available
  - Forge communitywide agreement about improvement goals
  - Subordinate the traditional roles of boards, administrators, and teachers to the larger imperative of systemwide improvement.
- State and federal governments, as well as foundations, should facilitate, but not control. The federal or state government should encourage communitywide agenda-setting, provide modest assistance for strategic planning, and consider waiving categorical program requirements in the handful of large urban districts that enroll most minority students. It should not try to regulate or standardize community-based improvement efforts.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Dozens of business leaders, civic and political activists, school administrators, and school board members submitted to long and repetitious interviews for this study. If our report helps cities improve their schools, the interview respondents deserve most of the credit. We also owe thanks to staff members of the U.S. Department of Education, the Council of the Great City Schools, the National Education Association, and the American Federation of Teachers for helpful suggestions about the study plan. In addition, RAND colleague Linda Darling-Hammond and RAND consultants Wilmer Cody, Marta Samulon, and James Harvey made major contributions to the study. Jeannie Oakes and Erma Packman of RAND and Dale Mann of Columbia University also reviewed and helped sharpen the report.

# CONTENTS

PREFACE ..... iii

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS ..... v

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ..... vii

Section

I. INTRODUCTION ..... 1
- The Problem ..... 2
- Study Goals and Methods ..... 4
- Applicability and Limitations of Results ..... 8

II. OVERVIEW OF THE CITIES ..... 11
- The Double Helix of School Reform ..... 11
- Pittsburgh ..... 12
- Cincinnati ..... 13
- Atlanta ..... 14
- Miami ..... 15
- Memphis ..... 16
- San Diego ..... 17

III. CONTRIBUTIONS OF SPECIFIC ACTORS ..... 20
- Superintendent of Schools ..... 20
- School Board ..... 27
- Business and General Community Leadership ..... 29
- Teachers and Their Unions ..... 33
- The Media ..... 35

IV. CONCLUSIONS ..... 37
- Findings ..... 37
- Applicability to Other Cities ..... 41
- Roles for State and Federal Governments and National Foundations ..... 42

REFERENCES ..... 45

# I. INTRODUCTION

Most big-city school systems are in trouble, but some are on the road toward improvement. This report describes how communities improve their own schools and draws conclusions to help people in other cities get started. It is directed to people in large cities who know that their schools must be improved and want to do something about it. School superintendents, board members, principals, teachers, and union leaders are essential members of the audience for the report, but they are not the entire audience.

The most important finding of this study is this: An urban school system can be turned around *only* if the entire community unites on its behalf. The problems are too severe and intertwined—and entangled with broader community social and economic events—to be solved by the educational bureaucracy. Local business, political, and civic leaders and the heads of local universities and foundations, therefore, are also major targets of the report. State and federal policymakers—who cannot initiate local improvement efforts but who can facilitate or hinder the exercise of local leadership—are a secondary audience.

Despite widespread concern with the quality of elementary and secondary education, the problems of school systems in many major urban areas have steadily worsened in the 1980s. The problems of big-city school systems have grown as their resources have dwindled. Federal support to such schools has declined more than 17 percent, and the schools are more than twice as likely as the national average to have difficulty finding qualified teachers.[1] Racial isolation, dropout rates, absenteeism, crime, teacher unrest, and building deterioration have increased. Moreover, teacher quality, academic course content, grading standards, and college entrance rates have fallen.

At the same time, disadvantaged populations have become increasingly concentrated in central cities. By the mid-1980s, over 30 percent of school-age children residing in central cities were poor and 70 percent were from minority groups.[2] More than half of all black and Hispanic children in the country attended school in the central-city

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[1]Council of the Great City Schools, *Challenges to Urban Education: Results in the Making*, Washington, D.C., 1987.

[2]U.S. Department of Education, Center for Education Statistics, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, *The Condition of Education, A Statistical Report*, Washington, D.C., 1986.

school districts of our largest metropolitan areas.[3] Immigration and differential fertility promise to accelerate these trends. Public school students in big cities are nine times as likely as children in the nation as a whole to be from single-parent households.[4] Moreover, they are twice as likely to drop out of school or to be charged with crimes.[5]

These developments mirror events in the larger society. During the 1980s, the major central cities suffered serious economic and social declines: Economic change hit large northern cities hard, and the redirection of federal funds away from urban housing, transportation, and education programs eliminated many external resources on which cities had come to rely.

In education, the reform movement stimulated by *A Nation at Risk* affected cities, but with less measurable results than elsewhere and perhaps less benignly.[6] Urban schools that adopted higher secondary school standards for students and teachers had to waive them because elementary school students were not prepared to function at the specified levels. Tough new teacher standards were also abandoned when the shortage of qualified teachers became obvious.

There are bright spots. Several large central cities have worked against these trends, marshaling community financial, technical, and leadership resources to reverse the decline of their schools. This report demonstrates how they accomplished it. The findings send a hopeful message to parents and civic leaders in other big cities: Local people and local resources can change the morale and effectiveness of the school system.

Despite the severity of the problems and the lack of a "magic" solution, however, several cities have made good starts and have demonstrated the commitment to keep working with the energy required for the long, tedious task ahead. This report describes how they got started, defines what they still need to do, and suggests how others might take advantage of their experience.

## THE PROBLEM

During the past two decades, big-city school systems have faced multiple problems: difficulty passing bond issues, a high incidence of middle-class flight to private and suburban public schools, frequent

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[3]Council of the Great City Schools, 1987.

[4]Committee for Economic Development, *Investing in Our Children: Business and the Public Schools*, Washington, D.C., 1985.

[5]U.S. Department of Education, 1986.

[6]See National Commission on Excellence in Education, *A Nation at Risk*, Washington, D.C., Government Printing Office, 1983.

turnover of superintendents, strife between administrators and the school board, and strikes and work stoppages by teachers and other unionized employees. Differential birth rates have further increased the proportion of students in big-city school systems who are poor, minority, and from single-parent and welfare homes.

Most school leaders readily acknowledge that the problems are too large for schools alone to solve. In many cities, school board members, teachers, and administrators have lost confidence in each other. The general public sees schooling as the responsibility of teachers and bureaucrats, not a central concern of the community. Schools have too many liabilities to attract the help of ambitious politicians, cost too much to interest business and taxpayers, and provide services that are too low in quality to retain the support of the middle class. The result is that central-city schools are increasingly isolated from the mainstream of civic, political, and economic life.

Big-city school systems are also weak and internally divided organizations. Sheer size is one problem: Central staffs are large, highly specialized, and remote from the schools, so that superintendents and board members deal with education only indirectly and through policy rather than through direct contact. Many urban school systems resemble corporate conglomerates and, like holding companies, administer separate categorical and entitlement programs that are forces unto themselves.

The special programs enacted since the 1960s to provide special funding and service entitlements for disadvantaged and handicapped children have helped many children at the cost of weakening the managerial and administrative control of the big-city school systems. Categorical programs require that beneficiary students receive distinctive and readily identifiable services. Bureaucratic accountability requires specialized organizations to write proposals, document the use of funds, and negotiate with federal and state program monitors and auditors. Specialization means that people responsible for the basic instructional program—the board, superintendent, and ultimately the principals and classroom teachers—do not feel fully responsible for the education of poor children.

The larger social dynamics at work on the schools and the internal managerial difficulties combine to lead some observers to question whether urban public schools can be improved. Some even question whether they have a future. They conclude that improvement efforts are counterproductive—that education for the urban poor can improve only if public school systems in large cities are subject to external com-

petition fueled by government-funded "choice" plans.[7] This report draws no such conclusion.

Competition may be healthy, and private school placement can help some low-income students. But our results demonstrate that choice plans are not necessarily preconditions for the improvement of big-city school systems. The broader community's interest in having a competent and effective public school system is enough to initiate change. The enormous financial and intellectual resources available in every major urban area have combined in several to make a real difference in minority children's education. Every city possesses such major assets as an educated middle class, black and white; large, well-managed businesses; important financial institutions; powerful research universities; and potentially generous local foundations. All have sophisticated political, religious, and social leaders capable of uniting to solve a problem if they consider it significant.

This report documents how six cities—Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Atlanta, Miami, Memphis, and San Diego—have marshaled their resources to respond to the many problems of public schools. The remainder of Sec. I describes the study's goals and methods. Section II provides an overview of the six cities. Section III examines the contributions of specific leaders in the school improvement process, and Sec. IV presents the major findings and conclusions of the study.

## STUDY GOALS AND METHODS

In the late 1980s, a few central-city school districts reached settlements with their teachers' unions that created frameworks for educational improvement in the course of establishing labor peace. Some districts had reportedly arrested white and middle-class flight, and some had gained new local-source revenues after years of tax-levy defeats. Local businesses were active in a variety of ways: sponsoring individual schools, backing tax increases, and helping to build comprehensive strategies for districtwide school improvement. Some big-city superintendents had gained reputations as educational innovators and effective advocates for low-income and minority students.

Counterbalancing the good news was the evidence that student achievement, school completion, and teacher performance remain low in virtually all big-city school systems. It seemed premature to assume that any school system had fully solved its problems, but it was appropriate to ask how the systems that had made some progress had

[7]This view will be presented in John E. Chubb and Terry E. Moe, *What Price Democracy: Politics, Markets, and America's Schools*, The Brookings Institution, forthcoming.

begun. The basic goal of the RAND research, therefore, was to understand the processes by which improvement was begun and sustained. In particular, the project examined:

- Typical precursor events (e.g., the hiring of a new superintendent or the settlement of lawsuits or labor disputes)
- Sources of initiative
- Leadership strategies and decisionmaking processes
- Roles of particular people and organizations, including the school board, superintendent, teachers' and other unions, businesses, civic organizations, and local political leaders
- The importance and sources of new funds.

The project focused on the school system as a whole rather than on individual schools. Most cities have individuals—usually school principals—whose inspirational leadership has transformed one school. Because such leaders must concentrate their energies on the students and teachers in their own buildings, they seldom directly affect the broader school system. Such people—and numerous scholars and curriculum developers—may have generally applicable ideas, but they have no capacity to get them broadly implemented.

For any good idea to affect a whole school system, it must be accompanied by a strategy to attract attention, create a favorable consensus, find resources, and ensure teacher and student cooperation. We hoped to identify such strategies and show how they came about and functioned. We assumed that every districtwide improvement strategy would embody some ideas about curriculum and teaching technique, and we wanted to document them. But our principal goal was to learn how such ideas were developed and used in the course of creating a broadly shared determination to improve the schools.

We did not look for a single best model for improvement. Every major school system is unique and even the most advanced may have made only a beginning. We hoped, however, to provide a set of exemplars that community leaders and school boards across the country could use in developing their own improvement strategies.

The research began with the identification of a small number of problem-ridden urban districts that were reported to have made significant improvements in the past five years. For each district, we sought to document the nature of the changes made, the leadership strategies needed to develop and implement change, the coalitions and resources required to make the improvements lasting and effective, and the challenges still remaining.

## Defining Improvement

Two assumptions led us to a broad and flexible definition of improvement. First, we assumed that the key processes were at an early stage and incomplete and that the improvements might have affected some school district operations more than others. Second, we expected that differences in local conditions would have brought corresponding differences in the leadership and problem-solving strategies and, hence, that the sequence of improvements would vary from one district to another.

Based on this definition, the project sought districts that had consciously implemented plans to advance at least one and preferably two or more of the following attributes:

- Its external reputation
- Taxpayer and business support
- Working relations among the administration, the board, and the teachers
- Major districtwide curriculum and accountability initiatives
- Teacher training and staff development in support of school improvement schemes
- Student performance improvements, such as lower absenteeism or higher achievement scores and school completion rates.

A district's improvement could be characterized by scope (the range of attributes on which it had improved) or degree (the intensity of improvement). Because we did not intend to rate districts but, rather, to explain how improvements came about, we could examine districts whose improvements varied in both scope and degree.

## Identifying Districts for Study

The broad definition required a broad site selection process. The project director interviewed a panel of experts familiar with urban school systems, asking each respondent to nominate any large urban district that might fit the definition of improving. Respondents included leaders of national associations (school boards, administrators, and big-city schools), national teachers' unions, staff of the U.S. Department of Education, educational consultants, and deans and professors of education in major universities. We also obtained a capsule description of the nature of the changes made to date in each nominated district and key events in the process.

This procedure produced a list of approximately 30 school districts. We eliminated some immediately because they were not large urban

districts; we eliminated others because cited improvements were narrowly based (e.g., limited to a very small number of schools) or nominated by only one expert. Seventeen school districts survived the initial screening process. Ten of these were selected for potential fieldwork based on multiple nominations and diversity in terms of region, economic base, ethnic makeup, and types of improvement.

Of the ten districts, four were eliminated, either because the future of their improvement plans was in doubt after the key actors (e.g., the superintendent) had departed, or because the improvement process was still in the "talking" stage. Six remained for further study: Atlanta, Cincinnati, Memphis, Miami, Pittsburgh, and San Diego. We regarded these districts as promising sites for research, but we did not assume that they were better than districts not on our list or that they were exemplary in all respects. They had exhibited some signs of improvement, and the project was designed to understand how those improvements came about. We expected to learn that some had made more progress than others and that serious unsolved problems remained. These expectations were confirmed.

Clearly, all six districts had recently faced severe problems. In the 1970s, several had lived through repeated failures to raise revenues, the flight of white and middle-class students, student achievement declines, soaring dropout rates, and teacher strikes and other work stoppages. Severe strife between and among school board members and school administrators—including in one case a fistfight, and in another, criminal indictments—was common.

At the same time, these sites all had important resources, including large metropolitan economic bases, prosperous business headquarters, strong colleges and universities, and enclaves of well-educated citizens. In the early 1980s, each site had plenty of room for improvement combined with significant resources that might contribute to an improvement strategy. And, according to the panel of experts that we consulted, all had taken advantage of these resources to begin the improvement process. The project sought to understand how they had begun and what they had accomplished.

## Fieldwork

The RAND team conducted case studies of the six districts during the 1987–1988 school year. The fieldwork consisted of series of semi-structured interviews and document searches, usually requiring two to four visits to each site. We interviewed a standard set of respondents, including:

- Superintendent of schools
- Deputy superintendent and other administrators
- Members of the school board
- Teachers' union president
- Civic and business leaders
- Local government officials
- Local education reporters and publishers
- Teachers and principals.

Respondents were selected to include people who often take opposing positions on school policy questions. In each site, we also identified reputed critics of the improvement plan and broadened our base of interviewing so that questions in dispute could be more thoroughly investigated. We report only findings that could be substantiated through multiple independent interviews.

Interviews covered the following issues:

- When did the improvement trend start?
- What were the key initiating events?
- Who were initially the main actors, and what roles did they play?
- What were the main actors' strategies for setting goals, gaining support, and ensuring implementation of improvements?
- Who are the main actors now?
- What specific things are being done now—both inside the schools and in the larger community—to implement the improvements and ensure their continuation?
- What additional problems must still be addressed?

The information from these interviews was summarized in district-specific case analyses; these analyses formed the basic data base for this report.

## APPLICABILITY AND LIMITATIONS OF RESULTS

Because we did not study a matched sample of reputedly *declining* school systems, we cannot say that the processes that we observed in these six cities are not going on elsewhere. They obviously are. Other cities, including Portland, Oregon, Rochester, New York, and Minneapolis, Minnesota, have apparently begun serious improvement efforts. Beyond such places with strong reputations, we expect that some traces of public concern and centers of educational excellence exist in most cities. Many cities have concerned publics and earnest

improvement efforts in some schools. But broad strategies to combine community resources on behalf of systemwide educational improvement are clearly not the norm in America's cities.

The results of our study provide ideas and encouragement for urban community leaders and educators who want to attack their schools' problems. The improvements observed, and the leadership strategies that led to them, are so specific to individual communities that none could be precisely duplicated elsewhere. But that is hardly surprising. The results reported in subsequent sections have twofold utility: first, as proof that real progress is possible even in difficult situations and, second, as a frame of reference within which local activists can build their own strategies.

All of the cities that we studied have made some progress, at least to the point of assembling the people and resources that can make real improvement possible. But none has as yet reached its goal. Despite progress to date, all have serious endemic difficulties that require ongoing appraisal and renewal of commitment.

A number of recent reports have proposed improvements in urban and minority education. *A Nation at Risk* started the trend by urging reform through raised standards, including more rigorous training and screening of teachers, upgraded course contents and student workloads, and higher graduation requirements. The next wave of reports emphasized building the intellectual capital of schools by improving teacher training and creating a more constructive professional working environment for teachers.[8] A third wave has emphasized changes in the structure and operation of individual schools.[9] Others have suggested how the business community can stimulate and help finance school-level improvements.[10]

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[8]See, for example, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, *An Imperiled Generation, Saving Urban Schools*, Washington, D.C., 1988; Linda Darling-Hammond, *Beyond the Commission Reports: The Coming Crisis in Teaching*, The RAND Corporation, R-3177-RC, July 1984; Arthur E. Wise, Linda Darling-Hammond, and Barnett Berry, *Effective Teacher Selection: From Recruitment to Retention*, The RAND Corporation, R-3462-NIE/CSTP, January 1987; Arthur E. Wise and Linda Darling-Hammond, *Licensing Teachers: A Design for a Teaching Profession*, The RAND Corporation, R-3576-CSTP, November 1987; Jeannie Oakes, *Improving Inner-City Schools: Current Directions in Urban District Reform*, The RAND Corporation, JNE-02, 1988.

[9]See, for example, David T. Kearns and Denis P. Doyle, *Winning the Brain Race: A Bold Plan to Make Our Schools Competitive*, Institute for Contemporary Studies, San Francisco, 1988.

[10]See Committee for Economic Development, *Investing in Our Children: Business and the Public Schools*, 1985, and *Children in Need, Investment Strategies for the Educationally Disadvantaged*, 1987; also Business-Higher Education Forum, *American Potential: The Human Dimension*, 1988.

This report complements the others in two ways: First, it treats issues of leadership—initiative, assembly of resources, and creation of consensus—rather than classroom practice. Second, it focuses at the level of the school system, rather than on the school or classroom. It deals with how a whole community (rather than a particular school) can marshal its resources on behalf of sustained and general improvement in all its schools.

Plans and procedures for school improvement must differ from place to place, depending on student needs, school histories and current capabilities, and the limits of available funds. But any improvement scheme must have leadership and a strong enough base of support among parents, teachers, and the larger community to survive many years of sustained effort. This report shows how leadership can emerge and create broad support for a systemwide strategy of school improvement.

# II. OVERVIEW OF THE CITIES

Site visits confirmed the fact that each of the nominated cities had made important and different changes since 1980 and that each city's improvement process was unique. Some had upgraded curricula, staff training, or measurement of educational outcomes; others had gained greater funding from local taxes, rationalized school district organization, obtained support from businesses, stabilized relations with the teachers' union, or improved collaboration between the superintendent and the board. None could pretend that it had solved all of its problems. But all had made changes that belied the popular conception of urban school systems as deteriorating and despairing.

## THE DOUBLE HELIX OF SCHOOL REFORM

Like the double helix that combines and recombines genetic material to renew life, a citywide school improvement strategy must combine two complementary strands. The *outside* strand attracts and mobilizes political support and other resources from outside the traditional school bureaucracy, from taxpayers, businesses, and the larger community. The *inside* strand focuses on the content of schooling—curricula, academic standards, incentives and work rules for teachers, and a philosophy of school management.

The improvement efforts of all six cities have both inside and outside strands, but in most the development of the outside strand far exceeds that of the inside. Although serious, most internal efforts to improve the schools are piecemeal and limited to a few schools. Only in Pittsburgh and Miami are the inside and outside strands comparably complete and fully articulated. In both cities, outside support is based on the coherence and promise of the changes being made in the schools.

The other four cities are developing the inside strand slowly, moving toward a mastery learning curriculum with complementary staff development and test-based accountability programs. Two are trying to give principals more discretion in school management, and all hope to increase teachers' sense of professionalism. But none of those efforts is simple, and some (e.g., mastery learning curricula and teacher professionalism) are not easy to reconcile. As later sections will show, most school improvement efforts must pass through many cycles of trial, error, and renewal. Neither the outside nor the inside strand can

be considered complete; both must be developed further and continually adjusted to each other.

The distinction between outside and inside strands of a school improvement strategy is significant and bears watching. Public support cannot be maintained for long if nothing changes in the schools. One should not, however, make too much of the current relative overemphasis on the outside strand: For most cities, developing a more complete inside strand may be only a matter of time.

## PITTSBURGH

During the late 1970s, Pittsburgh underwent an economic and an educational depression. The accelerated decline of its manufacturing base was accompanied by a stressful desegregation process, sharp test score declines, open conflict between the school board and school administration, and teacher strikes and work stoppages. These parallel developments led to rapid middle-class flight.

By 1980, Pittsburgh's highly effective business and civic organizations had come to recognize the schools as a major liability and had pledged to improve them. The teachers' union leadership came to the same conclusion and abandoned its long tradition of confrontational bargaining in favor of collaboration with the school system. When Richard Wallace became superintendent in 1982, he capitalized on these trends to create a districtwide strategy of school improvement.

Wallace moved on three fronts. First, he created a process of needs assessment and public consultation that culminated in a formal board-superintendent agreement on long-term priorities. Second, he instituted a comprehensive districtwide assessment program and complementary curriculum and staff development programs. Third, he became a member of the Allegheny Conference, a loose alliance of business and civic elites, thereby guaranteeing support for very high levels of school expenditures and corporate sponsorship for ambitious new programs. These three efforts were closely integrated: Curriculum and testing programs and activities supported by private funds were all designed and justified in light of the board-approved priorities.

Wallace emphasizes the substantive educational features of his strategy, and he has written and lectured widely on his system of "data-based educational management." The school system's strong research and evaluation division has developed a system of frequent instrument-based assessments of students, teachers, and principals. According to most observers, Wallace uses his data systems astutely; their utility, however, is more symbolic than technical. He uses the

data to focus attention on his theme that teaching is the real business of Pittsburgh schools and that all progress is measured in terms of improvements in the instructional process.

Teachers and administrators criticize the core instructional and staff development programs that Wallace has developed, arguing that they dominate classroom time and inhibit teachers of fast-learning students from moving beyond the minimum curriculum. Most agree that he has concentrated all the resources of the school system and community on the education of disadvantaged children and has ensured that students in even the poorest schools receive focused and goal-directed basic skills instruction.

## CINCINNATI

Cincinnati schools hit the low point in their performance and public acceptance in the late 1970s. A controversial desegregation plan, significant white flight, and teacher unrest contributed to their problems. Dropout rates and student test scores declined steadily for nearly ten years; conflict on the school board, including a well-publicized fistfight between board members, led to consistently negative treatment in the local press. Over a ten-year period, voters rejected every proposed school tax increase.

Business leaders, including the presidents of major national companies with headquarters in Cincinnati, united in the late 1970s to revitalize the downtown area. They concluded that physical rehabilitation would not suffice and that Cincinnati's reputation and the future of their firms depended on improving the schools. Their first project was a school tax election. Support from business (and from the teachers' union, which abandoned confrontation tactics in favor of advocacy for school improvement) made the campaign a success. Business leaders next offered to help with noninstructional problems, such as accounting, fiscal management, transportation scheduling, and food service, and they instituted an adopt-a-school program.

These efforts did not amount to a concerted school improvement effort until 1986, when two events coincided. John Pepper, the new president of Procter and Gamble, the city's largest business, returned from a National Alliance of Business conference on public education determined to marshal the talents and resources of Cincinnati business on behalf of poor minority students. Shortly thereafter, the school board appointed as superintendent Lee Etta Powell, an out-of-towner but a tough and capable administrator who, as a black female, might be able to gain the confidence of the city's low-income and minority population.

Black city councilman J. Kenneth Blackwell understood the unique opportunity created by the changes in business and the schools and proposed a citywide Youth Collaborative that would take a comprehensive new look at local education. The Collaborative is now Cincinnati's most active civic enterprise, commanding many hours of donated time from chief executive officers (CEOs) and senior corporate staff, university presidents and deans, church leaders, and political interest group leaders.

The Collaborative is developing a comprehensive strategic plan for education in Cincinnati, from preschool through college admission and job placement. Members are obtaining the necessary funds from public and private sources—$6 million has been pledged to date for school improvements and college tuition guarantees—and negotiating changes in state laws and regulations. The teachers' union, school administration, and school board are represented on committees, but the Collaborative has assumed some of the usual policymaking functions.

Since 1986, the school system has made modest improvements in curriculum and staff development, improved staffing in the most disadvantaged schools, implemented teacher career reforms, and simplified the district administrative structure. The results of these actions are expected to become evident in the 1988–1989 school year. But more fundamental change is anticipated in the future. Thanks to the Collaborative, the forces at work on educational issues hold far more power than the usual constellation of board, superintendent, and teachers' union. The final results may be a profound restructuring of the schools and of their relationships with the larger community.

## ATLANTA

Though Atlanta schools have traditionally been well funded and administered without scandal, they were considered poor in the late 1970s. A long desegregation struggle and rapid loss of middle-class students led to poor morale and low expectations. A desegregation-related court order to hire a black superintendent fed the belief that the schools would be dominated by racial issues and weakly led.

Alonzo Crim, the new superintendent, was a northerner whose background was stronger in social work and the ministry than in educational administration. He met the Atlanta community's skepticism head-on by declaring himself the advocate of all children, not just blacks, and by launching an intense personal campaign of speeches, consultations, and samplings of public opinion.

Through some two years of intense personal effort, Crim established himself as the authoritative interpreter of the Atlanta community's educational needs and aspirations. From public opinion polling results he extracted a set of goals and priorities to guide the school system. Once these priorities were set—improvement of basic skills, attention to school-to-work transition, equitable resource distribution, improvement of school-community relations—Crim believed that he had a mandate for strong action. Although the priorities were general and predictable, they legitimatized any actions that might advance them.

Based on this mandate, Crim initiated broad programs of remedial and compensatory education, insisted on strong PTAs in every school, strengthened testing programs and published students' scores by school and by race, and obtained business support for school-to-work transition programs. Crim operated throughout as an inspirational leader and head of a "community of believers," not as a line manager. He regarded himself as more than a standard educational administrator; he came to see himself as a preacher and community organizer, and Atlanta approved. He involved Atlanta's business and financial power structures and also reached out to minority leaders in the churches and small businesses.

Crim believes that education works if it is based on caring personal transactions. He did his part by tutoring and serving as "big brother" every year to one or two disadvantaged students, and he extended the enterprise to include the entire community. Crim left the superintendency in June 1988 with Atlanta schools still deeply troubled, but with the school board and business community committed to a continuing struggle on behalf of the priorities that he had led them to accept.

## MIAMI

The Dade County Public schools serve the entire Miami metropolitan area, including some very wealthy areas as well as poor ones. Hispanics constitute the most numerous minority, though many from the Cuban community are neither from low-income families nor educationally disadvantaged. The black community remains the most disadvantaged and dissatisfied minority group. The Mariel boatlift from Cuba and continued immigration from the Caribbean and Latin America force the school system to continually patch together new staffs, curricula, and schools. Endemic ferment has led to a student dropout rate over 30 percent and a long tradition of strikes and work stoppages by the teachers' union.

The current innovation effort has many sources: a decade of leadership by the head of the local teachers' union; a succession of open-minded and risk-taking superintendents, leadership by the state of Florida, whose governor and legislature have traditionally fostered innovation and encouraged school districts to experiment with decentralized decisionmaking; and the local teachers' union, which has offered to waive teacher contract provisions so as to facilitate school-based management.

The concept of school-based management and shared decisionmaking forms the cornerstone of the innovation effort. Teachers, principals, parents, and community leaders receive control over their own schools. This type of management serves to encourage innovation and to tailor schooling to the needs of specific school communities. Schools are still held accountable for students' achievement test scores, but the planners hope to encourage the creativity and professionalism of teacher-staff teams by relieving schools of centralized regulation and eliminating complex administrative processes for purchasing and staff hiring.

The improvement scheme is essentially a large pilot project. It involves 10 percent of the district's schools, which receive extra funding and individualized treatment on most administrative issues. The basic strategy is to develop a repertoire of school-based models and generate sufficient public enthusiasm to make the plan work on a larger scale.

Results to date are positive; the schools have obtained business sponsorship for several highly innovative school-based plans (including primary schools on the premises of two large employers), the start-up of a college tuition guarantee program for disadvantaged students, and voter approval of a $980 million school tax increase. School superintendent Joseph Fernandez and teachers' union president Pat Tornillo are partners in brokering support for the scheme, but various local business, civic leaders, and state government officials play important roles. The innovations will not automatically spread beyond the original 30 schools to the remaining 270, but the basis has been laid for continued collaborative problem solving.

## MEMPHIS

Like several other school systems in our sample, Memphis embarked on its improvement effort after its struggle over desegregation was resolved. With a black-majority school system, Memphis could not eliminate all racial isolation, and the flight of 30,000 white students

exacerbated many of the schools' difficulties. Resources to attack these problems were severely limited by an expenditure rate per pupil that is the lowest of any major U.S. city. Desegregation did, however, lead to a more racially balanced staff and encouraged the development of black community interest in the schools. As a result, in 1979 the black community successfully insisted on the appointment of a black Memphis native, Deputy Superintendent Dr. Willie Herenton, as superintendent of schools.

When Herenton took office, white parents and business leaders were as skeptical about him as the black community was enthusiastic. Herenton set his sights on reversing white flight and showing that Memphis schools could serve all children. He embarked on a personal crusade, addressing nearly 200 civic and church groups in his first year in office, ensuring them that he would be an advocate of all the children.

Herenton gained school board and business support for 21 new "optional" schools that attracted middle-class students of all races, and he organized parents to speak to their peers on behalf of the public schools. He also met with the heads of national corporations based in Memphis to gain support for magnet schools and a broader "partnership" (or adopt-a-school) program. Some businessmen have donated millions for additional programs, such as improved school social services, school-to-work transition, and college tuition guarantees. By insisting on publishing students' test scores by race, Herenton underscores the equity and performance problems that remain to be solved and the multiracial nature of his concerns.

Business and civic leaders are convinced that Memphis's economic future depends heavily on the image of its schools. Herenton is respected as a leader, and his national reputation is itself a major civic asset. Memphis's low per-pupil expenditures and sullen labor relations handicap any effort to change what happens in classrooms, but Herenton says that his efforts on that account have just begun.

The school board accepts his leadership, but Herenton may be paying the price of public attention. His relations with the local city council are increasingly fractious and corporate leaders are pressing him to employ more businesslike methods. Clearly, however, he has already assembled the community support that promises the funding necessary for broad substantive improvement.

## SAN DIEGO

San Diego encompasses poor inner city areas and wealthy suburbs. More than half the students in San Diego city schools are members of

minority groups, but Hispanics and Asians greatly outnumber blacks. Rapid migration means that the city is continually being resegregated. The school district has made serious efforts to desegregate many parts of the city, however, and minorities are strongly represented on the school board, administration, and teaching staff.

San Diego city schools were never considered altogether hopeless. But high dropout rates, low student achievement, and strife between the school board and the superintendent brought the schools' reputation to a low point in the early 1980s. In 1982, the school board conducted a national search for a superintendent who would serve as an advocate for minority children, build ties with the local business community, communicate openly with the board and community about the schools' problems, and reform an inbred "old boy" network that had long dominated the school district administration.

The new superintendent, Thomas Payzant, pursued the board's mandate aggressively. He simplified the school bureaucracy and promoted several promising young female and minority educators to principalships and senior administrative posts. He increased business participation in the schools through an adopt-a-school plan, and recently spearheaded a citywide Commission on Schools of the Future. The success of the Commission promises widespread support for further school improvement initiatives.

Payzant leads by example. He is credited with raising the intellectual tone of the school district, encouraging innovators to hope that their ideas will be heard, and serving as the city's advocate for poor and minority children. He insists on the full publication of test scores by school and students' ethnicity to focus public attention on needs for improvement. Payzant and the school board have continued to use the superintendent's job description and performance evaluation as a framework for discussing school system goals and priorities. Lower-level administrators are also supervised by openly negotiated annual job objectives and evaluation, both keyed to the district's goals and priorities. However, this accountability system is still in a rudimentary stage.

Though San Diego schools have instituted few dramatic curricular innovations since 1982 (the existing mastery learning curriculum was introduced as part of the desegregation plan in the mid-1970s), they have upgraded staff training. More dramatic changes are on the way, including a "common core curriculum" meant to eliminate tracking and remedial course work. The superintendent, widely admired, is considered a visionary leader, and the board shares credit for these achievements.

The superintendent's continued strife with the teachers' union and the absence of a general strategy for changing the schools mean the "inside" dimension of the improvement effort is not fully developed in San Diego. The task of translating charismatic leadership and a talent for innovation into concrete school improvement continues.

# III. CONTRIBUTIONS OF SPECIFIC ACTORS

Although the improvement process differed from city to city, we noted certain regularities in the contributions made by specific actors. The following detailed analysis of the roles of superintendents, business and community leaders, school boards, teachers' unions, and local news media provides examples that other cities might emulate and adapt to their own circumstances.

## SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

The school superintendent is usually the single most important actor in the improvement process, whether that person is the initial architect or an indispensable member of a coalition of improvement-oriented groups. No improvement effort that we studied caught fire without an active superintendent willing to interact with community forces and to attack the school system's inertia. The superintendent, in short, is the essential link between schools and the community.[1]

An improvement effort does not always require a new superintendent, nor does the effort inevitably die when an effective superintendent leaves office. But a successful improvement effort needs a superintendent who will play a broad and demanding role as a political leader and coalition maker. Superintendents who see themselves as fiscal officers, administrators of grants and regulations, or purveyors of educational technologies are unlikely to adapt to the challenges of systemwide change. The superintendent must be willing to break the school system out of existing goals, priorities, and habits. He or she must be willing to risk losing some traditional powers and status, to live with the disapproval of other important school officials, and to accept the risk that the entire effort might fail.

### Creating a Mandate: View from the Outside

The superintendents in our sample sought to become public figures and considered themselves accountable for major changes in the schools. Most sought a public mandate, an authoritative statement of

[1]Superintendents were not always the prime movers in our study. Business leaders, school board members, teachers' union presidents, and local politicians were also initiators. In one case, so many actors participated that none could be called the first.

goals and priorities to guide the policies of the school system. Mandates were invariably broad and general but not without meaning.

Superintendents traditionally have lengthy job descriptions requiring that they spend most of their time discharging specific administrative responsibilities. Mandates, in contrast, are topical, more like the promises that an elected official must fulfill than the general principles under which educators traditionally act.

The six superintendents in this study recognized that they needed, in addition to their traditional powers, agreement on direction and focus. As Alonzo Crim of Atlanta said, a superintendent's position is naturally weak, constrained by regulations, union contracts, fiscal limitations, school board preferences, and multiple constituencies. A superintendent who wants to make major changes needs much greater authority.

Crim enhanced his authority by building a personal relationship with the citizens of Atlanta. He spoke to dozens of community groups, asking each what the people wanted the Atlanta schools to accomplish. He saw that the citizens' hopes converged on a small number of aims, which he formulated and refined in subsequent public consultations. The result was a simple but compelling set of priorities which Crim could present to the school board as a mandate for endorsement:

- Improve children's basic skills
- Focus on the transfer from school to work
- Distribute school resources equitably
- Improve the school system's communication with the community.

But the priorities reflected a true public consensus and therefore justified strong action.

By making himself the conduit of public opinion Crim transcended the traditional role of the superintendent. In one stroke, he became the interpreter of public intentions, redefined his relationship with the teachers' union, and transformed his dealings with the school board. He also created a framework that could guide his own actions and control others' responses to them. His actions were motivated by the mandate; others either supported his actions or violated the mandate.

Superintendents created their mandates in different ways. Payzant created a San Diego mandate in open and extended negotiation with the school board: The superintendent's annual contract became the school system's goals and priorities for the year, and it was reviewed and renegotiated each year in the course of the school board's public evaluation of his performance. In Memphis, Herenton followed Crim's

pattern, making himself the interpreter of public and business-community opinion.

Powell in Cincinnati is negotiating her mandate in the course of communitywide deliberations on the Youth Collaborative. She is careful to include and accommodate the school board in the deliberations, but the mandate she derives from those deliberations will transcend the school board's authority.

Wallace created the most elaborate and self-conscious mandate in Pittsburgh. He used formal needs assessment and public opinion polling to establish an unassailable claim of unique expertise. He organized a long retreat during which he led the school board in identifying the themes implicit in the needs assessment and polls; these themes became the school system's priorities. Like Atlanta's, Pittsburgh's priorities were simple:

- Improving the schools to increase student achievement
- Improving the quality of the school staff
- Creating cost-effective management.

But the process that Wallace had managed made them authoritative.

Wallace rigorously used the priorities to rationalize his actions and to guide school board policymaking. The board was consulted and informed on all matters of importance, but its responses were predictable in light of Wallace's ability to invoke the established priorities. Even school system press releases were constructed to reinforce Wallace's mandate, always casting events in light of their significance for the school system's priorities.

When changes in the Pittsburgh board membership brought in people who had not shared the earlier mandate process, Wallace reproduced the process for them, complete with formal needs assessments and surveys, a retreat, and a rewriting of the priorities. The results differed only subtly from those of the earlier effort, but they provided a fresh mandate, grounds on which he could deal effectively with the school board, the teachers, the administrators, and the public.

The superintendents' mandates worked because of their substance. They reflected public needs and aspirations, albeit as led and formulated by the superintendents, and they channeled and constrained the superintendents' own actions. Some superintendents found that following their mandates led them to controversial choices: Payzant's commitment to equalizing access to quality programs led him to open conflict with well-organized parents of gifted children. Wallace and others had to weather similar storms. But in return the mandates made the superintendents effective leaders.

## The Need for Results

Superintendents promised action in pursuit of their mandates, but they did not promise dramatic short-term improvements. Business and community leaders were sophisticated enough to realize that solutions would take a long time and might entail some false starts. Superintendents obviously cannot maintain support in the face of schools' utter failure to perform, but civic leaders clearly do not need to be sold quick fixes. If properly and candidly led, local business and political leaders will stick with serious efforts to solve problems that profoundly affect their own self-interest.

Most superintendents avoided basing their appeal on the sure success of a specific curricular innovation. Of all the superintendents in the six sites, only Wallace became associated with a specific curricular change—Monitoring Achievement in Pittsburgh (MAP)—which Wallace and the teaching staff developed after Wallace had established his mandate. Although all six superintendents promised concerted action to raise test scores, and all published test score results for all schools and ethnic groups, only one staked his reputation on obtaining test score gains of a particular size or on a particular schedule. (Crim delivered on a promise to raise Atlanta children's test scores above the national average within five years.)

Superintendents are unlikely to retain support if they fail to make any gains over several years. One would be naive to think that there was no teaching to the test or use of older testing norms in order to bring students "above the national average." But superintendents need not make extravagant promises; given the severity of problems they face, any progress is warmly received.

## Ensuring Continuity

The improvement process inevitably lasts longer than any superintendent's tenure. Thus, the priorities that fuel the improvement effort must be able to motivate action even after the originator is gone. Superintendents who hope that the improvement process will outlast them try to imbue younger staff with the principles of their strategy and otherwise prepare for succession. Payzant, for example, has promoted several ambitious young principals and administrators, and the next superintendent is expected to come from among them. Former superintendent Leonard Britten ensured the continuation of the Miami strategy by making Fernandez a key actor early in the improvement process.

An improvement process based wholly on a superintendent's personal effort will collapse when he or she leaves. In one city that we considered but did not include in the study, the school superintendent had created enormous public support and confidence through brilliant personal effort. The superintendent's approach, like Crim's, was personal and evangelistic. He inspired the school system and business community and dominated the school board. Despite his efforts, however, he was able neither to create broad agreement on lasting goals and priorities, nor to prepare possible successors. When he resigned, the system went without a superintendent for months while the traditionally fractious school board members squabbled and postured, some apparently hoping to become superintendent themselves. Many of the superintendent's ideas survived in particular schools, but by late 1988 we could not tell how much of the systemwide momentum that he created remained.

Similar uncertainty faces the other improvement efforts observed in this study. Crim left Atlanta at the end of the 1987–1988 school year, and the next few years will tell whether his successor can build on earlier gains. Miami and Cincinnati have continued to improve despite superintendent turnover. Some optimism about continuation in most of the cities studied is justified, however, because the superintendents based their appeal on the importance of the problems to be solved, not on their personal possession of a sure solution.

### Difficult Personal Politics of Leadership

In the United States, race, income, and ambition have met head-on in the schools. School superintendents must also cope with these difficult problems if they are to relate successfully to the larger community. In particular, the superintendent's race appears to determine the kind of public image he or she will project. The three black superintendents in the six cities have openly reassured parents in the white community that their children's needs will be met. Crim and Herenton made it their first order of business to state that they would be advocates for all children, without regard to race. Although they refused to reverse any progress that had been made toward desegregation, they assured white and middle-class parents that they would maintain magnet programs and college preparatory courses. Lee Etta Powell of Cincinnati serves a large population of poor Appalachian whites; she has been a strong public advocate of their interests.

The white superintendents' actions also contradict racial stereotypes. Wallace and Payzant have made the education of poor minority children their personal crusade and have suffered some criticism from

middle-class constituents as a result. Payzant's conflicts with parents of the gifted are paralleled in the charges that Wallace's MAP program upgrades the poorest schools at the expense of the strongest ones.

## Implementing the Mandate: The View from Inside

To this point, we have dwelt on superintendents' outside strategies. Our six superintendents' tactics in dealing with inside actors, particularly central office administrators, principals, and teachers, also show important similarities. These can be summarized under three points: information, principals, and professional expectations.

**Information.** Superintendents who want school change increase the flow of information. They manage the media to keep their priorities and accomplishments in the public eye and to reinforce the belief that the schools still need help. Herenton serves as his own press agent, using information about resource disparities and other needs as the context for his reports on student achievement gains. Wallace's full-time public information officer tries to answer questions about what is being done with Pittsburgh's high per student appropriations before the questions are asked. Both Pittsburgh and Atlanta use paid advertising to explain school plans, resource needs, and test score results. Powell's staff in Cincinnati provide the data that civic groups and the Youth Collaborative publish in their reviews of school resources and programs.

The superintendents in our sample believe that any area of school policy that is continually tracked and assessed will improve and that anything the superintendent monitors openly and shares with the public will be treated as important. Student test scores are an obvious topic of interest, but more sophisticated strategies use financial and teacher qualification data as well. Information enables a superintendent who wants to intervene in trouble spots to do so. It also helps to keep the schools' needs and performance before the public, reinforcing the twin messages that the schools' needs are serious but that improvement is possible.

**Principals.** Five of the six superintendents articulated a common management philosophy: Manage schools by managing principals. They tried to remove organizational barriers between themselves and principals, in some cases by reorganizing the school system to remove an intervening administrative layer. (This layer typically consisted of functional offices, e.g., curriculum, teacher personnel, or federal programs.) Principals had previously reported to several such functional administrators; under new arrangements they reported to area superintendents with comprehensive line authority and through them to the

superintendents. In Miami, the school-based management schools report to one assistant superintendent who has authority over all aspects of their operation.

Cincinnati's Powell was particularly articulate about the purpose of the change: Principals had come to see their jobs as fractionated by the demands of special-purpose supervisors, and some had lost track of their responsibility to create an integrated program that responded to the needs of students in their particular school. Restoring the line relationship between principal and superintendent reemphasized the idea that the principal, responsible for the whole school, reports only to administrators with comparably broad concerns.

Wallace in Pittsburgh went one step further. He created a data system that let him personally review the performance review information for each Pittsburgh principal every year.

**Professional Expectations.** Superintendents in our districts exemplified the "tight-loose" metaphor popularized by *In Search of Excellence*.[2] They were explicit and controlling about values and priorities but gave subordinates room to create their own tactical solutions to problems.

Superintendents exploited the leadership potential of symbolism and modeling. Crim (Atlanta), Wallace (Pittsburgh), Payzant (San Diego), and Powell (Cincinnati) demonstrated their commitment to improving the quality of instruction by spending major parts of their time in the schools. In fact, the superintendents who made the greatest internal changes treated teachers and administrators as professionals and led them by means of general guidance and modeling.

Payzant used modeling to induce an atmosphere of intellectual excitement and experimentation. According to San Diego administrators, the fact that Payzant always read the latest research and cited the results in everyday meetings encouraged others to keep up with the literature. As a result, they claimed everyone understood that change and improvement, rather than routine execution of administrative tasks, was the valued activity.

We were unable to observe superintendents in transactions with other control office administrators, principals, and teachers' union leaders; thus, we cannot report in detail on how they put these general principles into practice. Because big-city superintendents can deal directly with only a tiny fraction of the school system's professional employees, symbolic actions are all-important. Classroom visits and occasional participation in a principal's performance review or a

[2]Thomas J. Peters and Robert H. Waterman, *In Search of Excellence*, Harper and Row, New York, 1982.

school's awards ceremony for students help to create a vivid impression of what the superintendent considers important. An unannounced visit to a badly managed school site, followed by an ultimatum and possible firing of a principal drives it home. Superintendents Wallace, Herenton, Powell, and Payzant are apparently willing to go that far, but others are not.

## SCHOOL BOARD

School boards seldom invented or motivated the school improvement efforts in our survey. The one apparent exception was San Diego, where the search for a new superintendent was the occasion for a board-initiated review of priorities that eventually became Tom Payzant's mandate. As a result, the San Diego board has been Payzant's indispensable partner in the improvement effort.

The board's role is traceable to a 1982 election that changed its composition and brought pro-integration opponents of the former superintendent to positions of authority. The newly elected board president, Robert Filner, joined with new black members to pass a board resolution in favor of new, systemwide priorities. With the help of an executive search firm, the board refined the priorities into a job description and performance standards for a new superintendent. Candidates were interviewed extensively and even required to audition for the intended role as public spokesman and civic leader by giving a mock speech to an audience of civic leaders. The board's clarity of purpose and established intention to support an aggressive superintendent guaranteed it a continuing role in the improvement process.

Atlanta is a partial exception. There, the board as a whole did not originate the improvement process, but one key member may have done so. Alonzo Crim credits Benjamin Mayes, a school board member and president of Morehouse College, with introducing him to the Atlanta political and business leadership and coaching him on the strategy for building a mandate. Mayes subsequently died, and Crim has operated effectively without his mentor for many years. But the habit of collaboration has kept board members closely involved in the improvement effort.

In most cities, the board has been a player in someone else's leadership strategy. Board consensus on goals is indispensable. But in most cities, this consensus was created by forces outside the board, by the superintendent mobilizing and interpreting public opinion (e.g., Atlanta, Memphis, and Pittsburgh) or by business and civic elites that included the board in a communitywide strategy-building process (e.g., Cincinnati).

However the consensus was created, none of the improving districts has a factionalized board. Some had histories of board conflict, but all now support the overarching priorities created by the superintendent's mandate or community leadership processes. The boards discipline themselves to support those priorities, and board members deal with the superintendent within the framework the priorities created.

School board consensus on goals gives the superintendent the tactical flexibility that he needs for effective leadership of the school system. It also frees the superintendent to perform community leadership functions. A superintendent who must constantly mollify board factions or provide staff work for board deliberations on details of internal school system operations has no opportunity for broader community leadership. Board micromanagement almost certainly rules out major systemwide change. As one superintendent from a district not in our sample said, multihour school board meetings several nights a week dominate a superintendent's time and prevent public outreach and community leadership.

The implied prescription to school boards of "reaching a consensus on priorities and supervising the superintendent only to the degree necessary to ensure the implementation of board priorities" may be impossible for some boards to follow. A school board whose proceedings are the conflict resolution mechanism for a divided community will inevitably split. In such communities, concerted improvement efforts may be possible only after basic community conflicts are resolved. Perhaps significantly, the improvement efforts in five of the six communities started one year after a long battle over school desegregation had been resolved in court. For some boards, division and conflict may be founded in less basic concerns, a matter of habit, style, or the working out of board members' personal ambitions. For such boards a change toward consensus-building and support of an activist superintendent's community leadership strategy is essential.

In conflict-burdened districts the operating styles of superintendent and school system often complement those of the board and these styles, too, must change. If the board is willing to search for consensus and let itself be disciplined by the results, superintendents must meet them halfway by abandoning habits of secrecy and confrontation. As was evident in the prior histories of the San Diego, Pittsburgh, and Memphis schools, superintendents who are secretive or eager to wage war over the preservation of administrative prerogatives encourage micromanagement by the school board.

School boards that would promote systemwide improvement must be willing to let the community leadership into the schools' business. The superintendent must be free to deal creatively with broader community

elites, and the board must avoid hindering decisionmaking. As is obvious in Cincinnati, this approach guarantees that the board's roles and powers will change; moreover, its authority as an institution might diminish as more powerful community forces come to bear. Individual board members, however, can play more important roles than ever as participants in the broader consensus- and strategy-building efforts.

Board members in Cincinnati and San Diego have done just that, laying aside their mantle as sovereign authorities over all school issues to work as expert members of community problem-solving groups. Boards that adopt such attitudes risk much, but the gains can be measured in major improvements in the capabilities of the schools.

## BUSINESS AND GENERAL COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

Many kinds of community leaders played important roles in the cities observed: university presidents in Pittsburgh and Atlanta, education school professors and deans in Cincinnati and Miami, church leaders in Atlanta and Cincinnati, city councilmen in San Diego and Cincinnati, local foundation executives in Pittsburgh, and business CEOs everywhere. This analysis focuses on business leaders and local civic foundations. They are prominent in all large cities and possess the funds, technical resources, staff, and motivation that, properly focused, can make a major difference in the schools.

In the late 1970s, the low status and performance of urban schools discouraged business leaders from involvement with them. In the early 1980s, the national discussion of the responsibilities of businesses toward the schools set the stage for constructive action. National reports exhorted business leaders to take an interest in the schools. Such projects as the National Alliance of Businesses leadership conferences and its small planning grants for collaboration between businesses and schools stimulated action in many cities. Adopt-a-school and similar program-sponsorship arrangements helped businesses channel their funds and staff resources in support of particular schools or small experimental programs.

But sentiment and eagerness to act is not enough. The most successful business efforts have been focused and well integrated as a result of local systemwide improvement strategies. In Pittsburgh, Wallace sold the business community on the priority scheme that he had negotiated with the board and showed how business resources could improve curricula, staff development, accountability, and teacher career initiatives. In Miami, superintendents Britten and Fernandez and

union leader Tornillo sold business leaders on the school-based management initiative and showed how donated funds and services could be used effectively.

In Memphis, Herenton attracted business interest with his magnet-school strategy for encouraging middle-class return to the public schools. He built on that successful effort to gain support for broader and more ambitious innovations. In Cincinnati, business CEOs are themselves leading the effort to create a communitywide improvement and are building in their own long-term obligations to provide money and staff resources. They are also using their lobbying organizations and influence in the state capital to change state aid regulations that might otherwise constrain the local improvement effort.

This business commitment goes well beyond the dutiful and symbolic. Some businesses have committed millions in corporate funds, either to support specific elements of their local strategy or to subsidize the overall effort. Some, particularly those in Cincinnati, have committed an even scarcer resource, the time of their chief executive officers and senior corporate staff.

Cincinnati businesses are not donating surplus assets and unattached staff members to school improvement: Such people as the CEO and chief financial officer of Procter and Gamble and Kroger stores are spending as much as ten hours a week on the Collaborative. When the school board and teachers' union needed an independent cost estimate of some proposed teacher contract provisions, Procter and Gamble assigned its chief accountant to the job for two weeks. The quality, rigor, and impartiality of his analysis removed the issue from controversy and set the stage for broader use of the corporation's technical resources.

Businesses have to be strongly motivated to make such contributions. A well-established norm of civic responsibility—Pittsburgh's Golden Triangle and Cincinnati's downtown redevelopment—set the stage for school improvement in these cities. Other educational improvement can capitalize on such existing structures and habits. Pittsburgh's Allegheny Conference is probably the best-developed general structure for business participation in civic improvement, but similar local associations and foundations exist in most metropolitan areas. In Memphis and San Diego, the channels for concerted business action were not well developed and the school superintendent had to create them by bringing interested parties together.

**The Compulsion of Self-Interest**

In each case, self-interest motivated the business involvement. Business leaders believed that the future of their company was linked to the quality of life and labor supply in their city. As one CEO said, a big business is in trouble if it cannot depend on the local labor supply, or if the community becomes so divided or crime-ridden that talented people are reluctant to live there. If public schools were to become hopeless, businesses might have to choose between relocation and bankruptcy, especially businesses that had major financial and emotional investments in headquarters cities. Westinghouse in Pittsburgh, Procter and Gamble in Cincinnati, and Holiday Inns and Federal Express in Memphis are examples of locally based national businesses. Rich's and Lazarus department stores (Atlanta and Cincinnati) and the Mellon Bank (Pittsburgh) exemplify large businesses whose markets are primarily local.

Corporate leaders who can create a favorable climate for their businesses have no choice but to do so. This does not mean that business people always understand how badly the schools need help or that business can make a difference. As John Pepper of Procter and Gamble remembers, something that he heard at a national conference moved him to inquire about the dropout rate in Cincinnati, and he was astounded to learn that 40 percent of the city's high school students did not graduate.

Awareness of both the needs of the schools and the possibilities for effective business action depends on leadership. National business associations can stimulate businesses to look at their own capabilities, but the best sources of action are individual executives like John Pepper, local politicians like Ken Blackwell of Cincinnati and Bob Filner of San Diego, and local foundation and civic association staff like Robert Pease and David Bergholz of Pittsburgh. School superintendents like Crim, Payzant, and Herenton, who step outside their traditional administrative function to assume a broader civic leadership responsibility, most frequently play the leadership role.

Business self-interest is a firmer foundation than belief in some dramatic, quick-acting solution to the schools' problems. The active business leaders in our cities obviously were not inspired by a belief in some preengineered solution, nor does their commitment depend on fast results. They know that some problems are tough and persistent, that the problems are linked to social and economic, as well as to educational forces, and that such a complex system cannot change quickly. To maintain their own optimism, they set aside time to visit schools and talk with children. As one of these leaders said, "When you see

how great the kids are and how quickly they respond and learn, your enthusiasm returns. Being with kids keeps me going even when the system is refusing to budge. I know if we can find a way to get good schools the children will respond."

Business leaders may get impatient. Superintendents who mismanage their relations with business, or who are unable to move the school system's own bureaucracy, will not last. But the schools' problems affect the welfare of businesses directly—too directly for competent business leaders to abandon any strategy that might lead to improvement.

## Encouraging Accountability

Though many business leaders became intensely committed to the schools in general and to the improvement strategy in particular, most took care to ensure that ultimate responsibility for execution of plans stayed with the superintendent and board. Successful businessmen already have jobs and seldom want new ones. All of them understand the importance of clear job descriptions and the proper balance of responsibility and authority. They need a superintendent who is cooperative but effective, able to make good use of donated resources but not dependent on them.

In most cases a balanced relationship developed naturally in the interactions among competent people. In Pittsburgh, the relationship was further structured by the donors' policy. The Allegheny Conference provided funds for many aspects of the improvement strategy, but only on a temporary basis. These funds were expressly intended as seed money, support for risky but creative innovations. A simple test of the value of the innovations was whether the superintendent and board could find stable funding from local and state tax sources or from permanent business or foundation endowments.

As business executives became committed to a systemwide improvement strategy, they reached out to include the superintendent in the network of leaders of major local organizations. In some cities, the superintendent was formally made a member of key civic organizations; in one, a local foundation gave the superintendent a small annual grant to help him host occasional lunches and, in general, to deal with businessmen and professionals as a peer.

The symbolism is important: The superintendent is the manager of a major civic enterprise. Whatever the local business community can do to strengthen his or her hand will further a common cause and preserve the businesses' own stake in the local economy. By including the superintendent in such networks, business leaders reduce the

burdens on them to recruit new business supporters for the education effort. The superintendent can manage the outreach. As opportunities for outreach broaden, the superintendent can recruit new supporters and maintain old relationships.

## TEACHERS AND THEIR UNIONS

Teachers were unionized in all six cities that we visited, but the union's role in the improvement effort varied widely from place to place. Union leaders were indispensable players in the improvement process from the very beginning in Miami and Cincinnati. Miami's Pat Tornillo may have been the single most important actor. Without Tom Mooney, Cincinnati's school politics might still be focusing on the minutiae of school bus routes, budgets, and teacher work rules. Pittsburgh union president Al Fondy was at first skeptical about Wallace's strategies, but came to play a constructive, rigorously independent role in the improvement process. Teachers and union leaders played lesser but still important roles in San Diego and Atlanta as members of school system task forces and participants in broader public consultative groups considering broader educational improvements. Only in Memphis were the organized teachers isolated and lacking a stake and role in the improvement process.

The highly influential unions in Miami, Cincinnati, and Pittsburgh have similar histories. All had been led for several years by militant union activists who played confrontational politics in pursuit of improved teacher pay and working conditions. All had led strikes and teacher work stoppages as recently as the late 1970s and early 1980s. In Pittsburgh and Cincinnati, public hostility toward the teachers' union and fear of the chaos caused by strikes and job actions contributed to the schools' generally bad reputation.

In each case, the same union presidents who led teachers into labor-management confrontation also became effective collaborators in reform. Even before Wallace came to Pittsburgh, Fondy recognized that teachers had to build public confidence in themselves and the school system. In Cincinnati, Mooney concluded that the public would not tolerate further union militancy and that teachers' jobs could be improved only in the context of broader reforms. In Miami, Tornillo concluded that teachers could advance their interests more effectively in the context of school-site decisions than by contesting general labor contracts.

Without question, the unions that participated in the development of a general improvement strategy and defined teachers' needs and

interests in light of that scheme were the most influential.[3] Fondy negotiated improvements in teacher independence and self-governance as part of Wallace's broader curriculum and staff development initiatives. Mooney established a broad teacher professionalism scheme, making it the basis of the union's contract negotiations and establishing it as a premise of the Youth Collaborative improvement strategy. The fact that a union activist recently elected to the Cincinnati school board has proved extremely effective further strengthens the teachers' hand.

In Miami, Tornillo agreed to relax some parts of the teacher contract in return for higher pay and more flexible use of resources by teachers in school-based management sites. In agreeing to the specifics, the unions in Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, and Miami advanced not only the local school improvement effort but also major parts of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) national agenda on professional teaching.

Teachers do not always like improvement schemes, even in Miami, Pittsburgh, and Cincinnati. All of the union leaders are aware that they have led their members into new territory, and they are concerned about internal opposition. Even teachers who support the union leadership can oppose elements of the improvement strategy. Despite his good relationship with Fondy, many Pittsburgh teachers do not like Wallace. Some even sport "Wallace Must Go" bumper stickers. In their cities, Mooney and Tornillo can lead and exhort the teachers, but they cannot ensure that all will like the results of an improvement strategy.

The breakdown of the barriers between schools and the community means that unions and individual teachers come under public scrutiny. The most aggressive superintendents, including Wallace, Payzant, and Herenton, have strengthened top-down accountability. They can supervise principals and teachers efficiently and do not hesitate to judge, reward, and sanction.

Greater community involvement has increased lateral accountability as well: Principals and teachers must deal more openly with parents and neighbors in Miami and Cincinnati, and business leaders feel free to visit schools and express opinions in all our cities. Under such circumstances, issues of teacher morale and professionalism are being

[3]Based on a national survey of teachers' union contracts, McDonnell and Pascal concluded that most locals acquiesce in systemwide reform proposals when they are made but seldom take the lead in formulating and campaigning for such strategies. The Miami, Pittsburgh, and Cincinnati unions are apparently unusually active in leading local reform efforts. See Lorraine M. McDonnell and Anthony Pascal, *Teacher Unions and Educational Reform*, The RAND Corporation, JRE-02, 1988.

worked out in fluid and unpredictable circumstances. We do not yet know the outcome of these issues and whether teachers will ultimately feel supported and empowered by the improvement effort.

A powerful teachers' union with aggressive leadership is indispensable to a successful school improvement effort. This conclusion contradicts the widely held belief that such unions are the major barriers to school improvement.[4]

A strong union constrains the school board, the superintendent, and the community leadership, but with the cohesion and structure of an effective union, teachers can constructively influence reform. They must, however, have leaders who they believe represent their personal and professional interests. If they are unorganized or poorly led, neither their own leaders, the school board, and the superintendent nor the community can persuade them to support changes in classroom practice.

The indispensable role of teachers' unions becomes clear in cities where the improvement effort has an inside strategy to match the outside strategy of mobilizing community interest and resources. Such a strategy requires a strong union to gain the attention and command the respect of activist teachers. The union, in effect, serves as a major conduit for transmitting information and compliance pressure into the classroom.

In Pittsburgh and to a lesser degree in Cincinnati, the bargaining power of a strong teachers' union influences the improvement strategy, but it also ensures that an agreed-on strategy will be implemented. Weak teachers' unions in Memphis and San Diego can neither bargain effectively with the board and superintendent nor gain teacher cooperation with school improvements. Policies affecting classroom practice, especially the use of mandated mastery learning-based curricula, are apparently far more universally implemented in Pittsburgh than in San Diego. Cities with weak unions lack the leverage and leadership required to persuade teachers, even on behalf of improvements that teacher leaders personally favor.

## THE MEDIA

None of the six cities showed evidence of biased press coverage. In some cases, however, the superintendent had to work directly with editors and publishers to get balanced coverage. Crim, Wallace, Payzant,

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[4]McDonnell and Pascal's (1988) findings also run counter to the belief that unions naturally resist reform. However, their analysis also illustrates the risk that teachers' union leaders run when they abandon traditional bread-and-butter advocacy in favor of cooperation with broader reform efforts.

and Herenton each acted as his own chief press officer to ensure constructive coverage of the schools in the context of the district's larger priorities and achievements.

Most superintendents used their public mandates as the framework for their press relations, explaining particular actions and problems in light of local priorities. Wallace and his press secretary tried to include references to districtwide priorities in all news stories, even discouraging ones, to ensure that all news was read in context. As a result, they claim the press always had a substantive theme for its report, and superficial criticism took second place to progress reports on the achievement of goals.

All superintendents insisted on publishing student test scores, preferring to present the bad news as quickly as possible. All agreed that evasion or obvious management rows are dangerous and that candor is the best approach. Business people in Pittsburgh and Cincinnati helped the school systems to improve the quality of writing and graphics in some public relations material, but the essence of press relations continued to be the superintendent's careful management of long-term relations with editors and reporters.

Superintendents lamented the tendency of newspapers to assign education to apprentice journalists, thus guaranteeing that the reporters would be reassigned as soon as they learned the subject. However, as education became a higher civic priority, some newspapers increased the quality of their coverage and kept more experienced reporters on the beat. In each of the six cities, the press is well informed and superintendents manage press relations well enough to keep stories about particular events in context. The press and TV news organizations began to root for the local public schools, not unlike the way they root for the home athletic teams. But thoughtless boosterism serves nobody, and none of the superintendents seeks or wants it.

# IV. CONCLUSIONS

## FINDINGS

The findings with regard to schools are remarkably consistent with case studies of major corporations that survive serious financial crises or erosion of traditional market positions. The corporations that develop successful new business strategies typically:

- Reach out to new markets and clienteles.
- Create new open flows of information about market needs and corporate performance (in part by including knowledgeable outsiders in corporate deliberations).
- Create consensus on goals through broad internal consultations, personally managed by the CEO.
- Break down the traditional barriers among internal bureaucratic entities, thus increasing the leverage enjoyed by top corporate leaders.[1]

These themes have close counterparts in the school improvement strategies of Atlanta, Cincinnati, Memphis, Miami, Pittsburgh, and San Diego, where community leaders and the educational establishment

- Reached out to involve the larger community in educational issues
- Made information about community needs, school resources, and student performance broadly available
- Created communitywide agreement and understanding about educational improvement goals
- Subordinated the traditional roles of school boards, administrators, and teachers to the broad imperatives of a systemwide improvement effort.

### Outreach to the Larger Community

To begin the improvement process, all six cities have broken down the barriers between the schools and the community. Schools are no

[1]For a review of literature and case studies on business strategy development, see Susan J. Bodilly, *Twelve Case Studies of Terminations and Divestitures by Business Firms*, The RAND Corporation, N-2339-AF, 1986. See also James Brian Quinn, *Strategies for Change: Logical Incrementalism*, Richard D. Irwin, Inc., Homewood, Illinois, 1980; and Michael E. Porter, *Competitive Strategy*, The Free Press, New York, 1980.

longer seen as bureaucracies whose only consistent link with the broader public is the need for tax money. In these cities, schooling is treated as a general community concern, a true civic project that touches everyone by affecting the city's quality of life and economic viability.

Links between schools and community welfare have always existed. Many people have come to ignore them, however, in the mistaken belief that the city would prosper if it could attract educated, middle-class migrants from elsewhere. In the six cities of this study, this perception had changed. Leaders in local businesses, politics, churches, and taxpayer groups have realized that educated people will not move to places with bad schools. They have realized also that they can improve city schools by marshaling the whole community's intellectual and financial resources to support that goal.

In Pittsburgh and Miami, the outside strategy that built public support for education was integrated from the start with the inside strategy of real change in the schools. In other places, however, public appreciation of the importance of school problems came first. Those places still face the welcome challenge of transforming political backing, new sources of funds, and community intellectual resources into assets for improvement of the schools themselves.

### Broad Availability of Information

Each superintendent in the six districts has insisted on regular and complete publication of student test scores by school and by race; most also provide school resource data that parents can use to monitor the allocation of key schooling inputs. In some cities, private organizations have also gained access to basic school-system records and can publish their own tabulations and assessments.

Access to information enables citizen groups and private individuals to compare claims with performance. Openness about student performance and district administration complicates the lives of administrators and board members, but it also pays off in terms of community support.

The serious sharing of concern and responsibility demands accountability to community expectations. People want serious measures of progress, not sterile scorekeeping. Civic and business leaders expect to know about test scores, but they also want to know how money is being used, how teachers are being selected, prepared, monitored, and evaluated, how resources are distributed to schools, and what learning opportunities students really have.

Cincinnati provides an example of how the wide availability of information can eliminate potentially serious disputes. Procter and Gamble accountants, who had built the schools' accounting system and ensured that data would be readily retrievable, resolved an acrimonious conflict between the school board and teachers' union about the cost of a proposed reform plan. The corporate accountants' impartial cost estimates kept both sides honest. A third party's possession of the facts made extreme positions untenable and forced both sides to adopt moderate positions.

The Cincinnati accounting system enables anyone to get school-level data on funding, course offerings, staffing, materials, and student achievement. Parents and others can know where their schools stand and can point out inequities. The result is that the schools are not suspected of "putting something over," and Collaborative participants trust that their deliberations are premised on valid information.

### Communitywide Agreement on Goals

In these cities schooling has become far more than a political football or a rallying point for boosterism. Good schooling has become a community goal and a community responsibility in these six cities. Civic and business leaders regard education as their problem, not someone else's.

None of these cities based its improvement effort on a packaged educational innovation that promised to transform the schools overnight. Other cities made such efforts based on superintendents' overblown promises to revolutionize the schools through a new instructional system or gimmick. But by the time this study started, those efforts had already failed, and their promoters had moved on.

Support in these six cities was premised on the importance of the problem and on the belief that a solution would require communitywide effort. Acceptance of shared responsibility has made people patient; once they face the problems of urban education they know that a quick or cheap solution is impossible. People understand that the problems of these systems are not solved in one big push, but require many years of problem solving through trial and error.

Knowing that the public has access to real information about their performance, board members and superintendents understand the importance of opinion leadership. Like elected politicians, they understand that they can help construct the public expectations against which they will be evaluated. If these expectations are balanced and take realistic account of the problems to be solved and the resources available, performance assessments are likely to be fair. An informed

constituency is better than one that has been beguiled by flashy promises of immediate success.

The school improvement efforts in these cities started only a few years ago. Atlanta's, the oldest, has been going on for 15 years; Cincinnati's, the youngest, began its third year in 1988. But most are old enough to have foundered if no progress had been made, and slight progress is enough if it reflects serious effort backed by genuine community support and realistic expectations. Thus grounded, school policy and community contributions can evolve over time. Focus on the long-term importance of the problem can ensure that interest does not evaporate as soon as the first small success or failure is evident.

## Traditional Roles Subordinated to the Improvement Effort

School improvement, as this review of six cities shows, requires a major change in the dynamics of school administration. School board members and administrators are no longer free to deal only with each other; no one is autonomous.

These districts have moved toward a system of political accountability: School administrators and boards work to create public consensus about priorities and performance standards. Business and civic leaders do not themselves want to run the schools; therefore, they have an interest in helping school people work effectively.

Newspapers, government officials, and members of the school board help administrators convey a simple consistent message about educational priorities. Achievement test scores play a part, particularly in calling attention to the discrepancies between the performance of middle-class students and that of various categories of poor and minority students. Test scores, however, are treated as only one of several indicators of needs and progress. Under political accountability schemes of the sort evolving in these districts, accountability is as broad and diverse as the entire educational enterprise. It is not artificially constrained to fit available measurement technology.

When the barriers between education and the larger community are breached, information about all aspects of school operation becomes widely available. Parents and neighbors can go into the schools to draw their own conclusions about how things are going. Artificial accountability systems based on test score averages are subsumed into a richer and more comprehensive system of political and ethical responsibility.

Though school superintendents and board members have played important roles in all sites, they were not always the initiators or main

actors in the improvement efforts. The superintendent must be a respected public figure, seen as competent both to lead the school system and to deal as an equal with the corporate CEOs, elected officials, religious leaders, and university presidents who typically figure in the improvement effort. But business and civic leaders can lay a broader and stronger base for school improvement than can superintendents and board members alone. Sometimes the superintendent need be no more than a competent and open-minded partner.

A long-term solution to the problems of any big city's schools will take many years, far longer than the tenure of any superintendent or board. To succeed in the long run, a school improvement plan must provide for its own continuation. A permanent link to community leadership based on such enduring institutions as major locally based corporations and civic groups is essential.

Broad communitywide educational improvement schemes encroach on the roles traditionally played by superintendents, boards, and teachers' union leaders. In return for accepting change and uncertainty, however, these actors can hope to work in an environment of realistic expectations and genuine moral support. They can also hope to tap far richer lodes of financial, organizational, and intellectual resources than ever before.

## APPLICABILITY TO OTHER CITIES

The above conclusions apply to the central-city school districts in large metropolitan areas. The six cities studied cover a broad range in terms of city size, racial and ethnic composition, school spending levels, and governance structures. These cities typify U.S. central cities in the most important respects, all having

- A large and sophisticated business community whose success is linked to the local economy
- Educated adult populations
- Viable economic bases
- Ambitious civic and political leaders
- Civic organizations and foundations with traditions of effective intervention in civic life
- Strong universities
- News media capable of commanding local public attention.

These ingredients went into a concerted, systemwide improvement effort in the six cities. If mixed in light of local conditions, the ingredients should work elsewhere.

Two kinds of cities may have trouble adapting to these ingredients: small cities in large metropolitan areas and megalopolises. With regard to the first category, central-city districts inevitably receive the lion's share of attention from businesses, politicians, and the news media. Needy suburban or outlying school systems (e.g., Newark, New Jersey, Yonkers, New York, Prince George's County, Maryland, or San Bernardino, California) might have difficulty attracting the necessary attention.

In the second case, extremely large cities, such as New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles, can frustrate the efforts of even very large businesses, and their politics are often too turbulent to let school improvement issues assume the prominence that is possible in smaller cities. These cities have the necessary resources in profusion, but the leadership and consensus-building tasks involve far more difficulty than elsewhere. Such cities clearly can achieve systemwide improvement, and it may in fact be starting in Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles. The level of sustained political and economic commitment must be extremely high for the effort to succeed.

## ROLES FOR STATE AND FEDERAL GOVERNMENTS AND NATIONAL FOUNDATIONS

The processes analyzed above are essentially local ones. Communities have recognized their collective self-interest and have taken charge of their own problems. Citizens have formed coalitions, and area leaders are using local resources to cope with each city's unique conflicts and weaknesses.

To an encouraging degree, the people who have the problem have taken charge of it. That more than anything else creates a sustained effort against a troublesome problem. External actors should avoid any action that might derail such local efforts. Above all, higher levels of government or foundations should not rush in with money or new programs in such a way as to imply that the problems of urban education are about to be solved by outsiders.

Massive state or federal intervention might suggest that local leaders could not solve the problem alone. Moreover, it would convince local taxpayers and business donors that the costs of improvement can be shifted elsewhere. Newly engineered state organizational reform schemes, including "choice" plans, can encourage busy business people to conclude that school reform no longer requires their detailed attention. The lure of external grants is irresistible: Local leaders quickly

come to define their jobs as doing anything necessary to bring in the money available from outside sources.

Foundations and state and federal governments can, however, play several constructive roles. They can encourage the formation of local problem-solving coalitions through exhortation and the use of their good offices. They can pay some of the one-time costs for needs assessments and other mechanical activities necessary to start up a strategic planning process. In cities where the improvement process is already well established, higher levels of government can facilitate the local inside strategy by waiving regulations that interfere with serious efforts to improve schools on behalf of low-income and minority children. We conclude with brief descriptions of each of these potential roles.

### Exhortation and Good Offices

Some cities that have all the preconditions for a successful improvement strategy have failed to initiate one. A "spark," which in the six cities studied included the hiring of a new superintendent, a sudden inspiration by a senior business or political leader, or the teacher union's adoption of a school improvement theme, may be all that is missing.

In such a situation, a foundation president, state governor, or U.S. Secretary of Education might have useful leverage. Any of these officials could arrange a meeting in the city, including the local school board and administration, business and foundation leaders, and the mayor and city council leaders, to discuss the potential for a successful local attack on the problems of urban education. The convener could cite the successes of other cities in dealing with similar problems and enumerate the many assets of the present city that would make an improvement strategy work there. Any financial help, however, should be small enough that local leaders would see it as a gentle prod, rather than an autonomous motivation for action.

### Start-up Costs of Strategic Planning

Nonrenewable grants of around one hundred thousand dollars per district could pay for a small survey or needs assessment and its interpretation. A consultant or corporate employee assigned to work full-time for several months could ensure a good start for the local priority-setting process. If that process succeeds, local sources should be adequate to pay any additional costs of the locally crafted process. Foundations naturally have the flexibility to provide such grants, and

the Secretary of Education or a state governor might be able to offer existing contingency funds. If congressional or state legislative action were necessary, funds should be provided in small amounts and without the usual requirements for formula-based distribution among broad categories of school districts.

### Waiving Requirements

Among the six cities, the ones with the best-developed inside strategies all tried to return the schools to the unified control of the principal. Though many depend financially on federal and state categorical program funds, most were determined to let people at the school site build an instructional process to suit their particular students' needs. Some wanted to empower principals by breaking down the barriers between Chapter 1, or special education services, and the rest of the instructional program; others wanted to use state funds for preschool or after-hours programs that were not envisioned by state regulations. Some had negotiated favorable interpretations from state program managers, but more were sailing close to the wind of noncompliance.

Specially negotiated waivers of state or federal requirements might ease implementation of many cities' inside strategies and reinforce the point that power has shifted to local people. Such waivers should recognize the existence of comprehensive improvement efforts, not serve as inducements for new efforts. They should grow out of an ongoing collaboration between the education secretary or governor and a school district. A more general waiver program could weaken protections for students whose school districts have not shown the intention and ability to mount broad improvement strategies.

All these activities involve labor-intensive work on the part of busy people. But we are not talking about an external actor's devoting such attention to hundreds of school districts. There are fewer than 40 central-city school districts in the same size range as the six cited here, and they contain over 30 percent of all the black and Hispanic students in the country. The concentration of problems in these few places justifies the hands-on involvement of high officials and the creation of custom-made rather than standardized packages of assistance.

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